

Thanks...

I FREQUENTLY SPEAK at aviation medical examiner (AME) seminars, and when I do, I always take the opportunity to thank you for the excellent work that you do. I go on to say that we could not possibly manage the business of medically certifying more than 600,000 airmen without you.

In fact, you do such outstanding work that we are planning to expand your role to allow some of you to make initial special issuance or waiver decisions. At the moment, we tentatively plan to call these AMEs “Super-AMEs.”

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The Federal Air Surgeon's Column



By Fred Tilton, MD

It will take us a while to make that happen because we will have to make regulatory changes before we can delegate that authority. So, if you have an interest in expanding your function, be watching for the rule-making notice in the Federal register.

Those of you who eventually become Super-AMEs will be our very best and most reliable AMEs. However, because you have the authority to render such decisions does not mean that you will be expected to do so in a vacuum. We would much rather have you call us if you have questions than to issue a certificate in error.

As you may recall, in my first editorial I wrote about calling your regional flight surgeon or the Aerospace Medical Certification Division if you had questions or concerns. As a Super-AME, it will be even more important for you to keep the communication lines open because you will have the authority that currently is held only by Federal Aviation Administration physicians.

Even if you do not wish to be a Super-AME, we will continue to rely on you to use good judgment so that we do not have to reverse any of your decisions. When we have had

to do so in the past, it was often due to mistakes in issuing certificates to airmen who were taking inappropriate medications. Unfortunately, we recently became aware of more than 100 airmen that had been issued certificates while they were taking selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, or SSRIs.

These and other antidepressants are unacceptable medications! We have published articles on SSRIs in the *Federal Air Surgeon's Medical Bulletin*, they are clearly identified as disqualifying in the *AME Guide*, and they are covered in virtually every AME seminar.

We have had to spend hundreds of hours dealing with these inappropriate issuances. Airmen have been inconvenienced, and they are naturally angry. Appropriate corrective action has been taken against those AMEs who issued these certificates, and those who remain AMEs are not likely to be selected to be Super-AMEs in the future.

Antidepressants are not the only disqualifying medications and, often as not, the underlying diagnosis is disqualifying as well. I realize that only a few AMEs are responsible for these mistakes, but these events are so serious that I believe it makes sense to remind everyone to be careful. We are in the safety business, and poor decisions can have disastrous results.

So, pay attention to the articles in the *Bulletin*, read the *AME Guide*, keep up with your required AME training, and — by all means — call us when you have questions.

I will close the way I started by thanking all of you for your service. We couldn't do it without you.

— Fred